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Professor's death linked to alleged Taiwanese spying

Did agents for Taipei snoop on Dr. Chen while he lived in US?

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Washington

Rep. Jim Leach (R) of Iowa is calling it "Taipeigate."

But he and many others strongly suspect they should label it murder.

On July 3 an assistant professor of statistics from Pittsburgh's Carnegie-Mellon University (CMU) was found dead behind the graduate library of National Taiwan University in Taipei, the Taiwanese capital.

His name was Dr. Chen Wen-cheng.

A 7,000-word report, released recently by Taipei's district attorney, claims there is no evidence that Dr. Chen was murdered, and suggests he either jumped or fell from a fifth-floor fire escape at the library.

Mr. Leach, the ranking minority member of the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, is extremely skeptical of Taipei's finding. "The United States government should demand that the Taiwan government reopen its investigation," he declared at a congressional hearing July 30.

Some hours before he died, the 31-year-old Dr. Chen was taken to the headquarters of the Taiwan Garrison Command (TGC), the national security police, where he was interrogated and accused of engaging in disident activities in the United States.

The fact that his interrogators confronted him with photocopies of letters he had written in the US and tape recordings of phone calls he had made there, all allegedly confirming his guilt, has particularly alarmed Congressman Leach.

In his view, it is further evidence that the Taiwanese government maintains a network of agents in the US who watch compatriots for signs of disaffection.

Taiwanese officials declined an invitation to present Taipei's case at last week's hearing into Dr. Chen's death and the activities of Taiwanese agents in the US.

"There is no spy activity on US campuses," insists a Taiwanese government spokesman contacted in Washington. He says a "thorough investigation" was conducted into Dr. Chen's death. "There is no evidence of murder. His death was probably an ac-

Chen fell from the fire escape because he was exhausted after his TGC interrogation.

Although the young professor believed deeply that Taiwan should become a democracy, he was no radical, according to CMU president Richard Cyert. But he did come from a native Taiwanese family.

Of Taiwan's 17 million inhabitants, 85 percent are native Taiwanese. The remainder are Chinese. When Chiang Kai-shek was defeated by the Communists in 1949, he fled to Taiwan with 1 million mainlanders.

His nationalist party or Kuomintang (now headed by his son, Chiang Ching-kuo) has ruled the island ever since — to the dismay of many native Taiwanese who would like an independent Taiwan.

The Kuomintang has enforced martial law on the island for the past 32 years with the aid of the security police.

Leach said last week that the CMU professor's life was "as close to a storybook success as any foreign resident of the United States." He said that Chen had just signed another three-year contract at CMU and was "on his way to probable tenure."

The young professor returned to Taipei on May 20 for the first time since he arrived in the US some six years ago. He was particularly keen to present his son to his parents in a traditional ceremony at the family's ancestral shrine. While at home he visited friends, played softball, and read.

On July 2 came the summons by the security police to come to TGC headquarters. His family never saw him alive again.

The TGC insists it released him after 13 hours of interrogation. But Leach has doubts. "The TGC's reputation may be exaggerated somewhat by those who, with reason, fear it the most, but enough persons have been abused, tortured, and killed over the years by the command to warrant it the appellation of the ruling party's apparatus of terror," observed Leach last week.

According to Gen. Wang Ching-hsu, TGC commander, Chen probably committed suicide by jumping from the fire escape of the library because he feared he would be imprisoned for the treasonable actions to which he had confessed.

Amnesty International, the worldwide human rights movement, has alleged that the Taiwanese government extracts confessions from prisoners by physical and psychological pressure, including beatings, electric shocks, solitary confinement, and around-the-clock interrogations. It has put the number of political prisoners in Taiwan

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himself from the fire escape, the Taipei district attorney's report claims he expressed great remorse for what he had done.

Declaring the official report to be "filled with inconsistencies and descriptions of behavior that are uncharacteristic of Chen," CMU president Cyert says he and others at the university "do not believe that he... committed suicide through remorse for having believed in democracy and freedom." And he adds that "we have serious doubts about the accident hypothesis."

The autopsy conducted on Chen revealed injuries inconsistent with those normally associated with a fall. "The fact the bruises found on Dr. Chen's body would appear of that type inflicted in a beating rather than a fall have not been lost on those following the case," noted Leach at the recent hearing.

Added Mark Chen (no relation to Dr. Chen), president of the World Federation of Taiwanese Associations: "I strongly believe that Dr. Chen was murdered because of his political viewpoints."

The alleged spying on Dr. Chen while he was in the US deeply perturbs Leach.

"Spying by Taiwanese on Taiwanese in this country must be brought to a halt," Congressman Leach declared last month in a letter to John Holdridge, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. "The infiltration of American universities by informants who, directly or indirectly, report to the Taiwan government on the actions of Taiwanese faculty and students in this country," he said, "runs counter to the traditions if not the laws of this country."

In Mark Chen's view, the CMU professor "was a victim of campus surveillance in the US." Taiwanese agents infiltrate sections of the Taiwanese community such as the churches and student associations, he said.

Leach said that under the Foreign Agents Registration Act any Taiwan government official who pays money to student informants and fails to register with the US attorney general is guilty of a felony punishable by a fine of not more than \$10,000 or five years imprisonment or both.